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An Irish Wild-Flower

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AN IRISH WILD-FLOWER

ETC.

BY

SARAH M. B. PIATT

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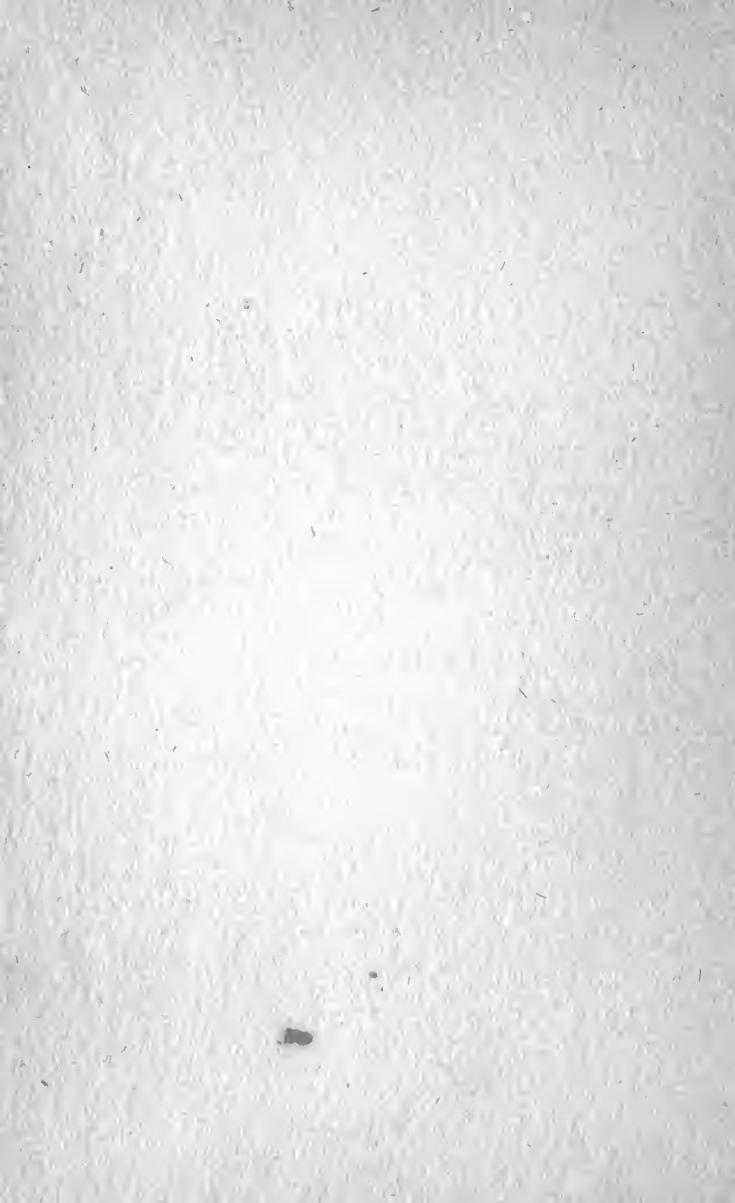
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AN IRISH WILD-FLOWER.

(A BAREFOOT CHILD BY ——— CASTLE.)

SHE felt, I think, but as a wild-flower can,
Through her bright fluttering rags, the dark,
the cold.

Some farthest star, remembering what man
Forgets, had warmed her little head with gold.

Above her, hollow-eyed, long blind to tears,
Leaf-cloaked, a skeleton of stone arose. . . .

Oh, castle-shadow of a thousand years,
Where you have fallen—is this the thing that
grows ?

FROM AN ANCIENT MOUND.

ON this lone mound of legend, heaped by hands
That have been dust from immemorial years,
Above their mythic chief, whose vassal lands
Forget his name,—so long forgot by tears,—

I dream. Below me rath and ruin are.

England's ally there shook down Philip's fleet.
Here sings a young bird like some morning
star. . . .

The old song's sorrow makes the new song
sweet.

ECHO AND NARCISSUS.

(IN AN OLD SEASIDE GARDEN.)

No, Echo, upon my word
There isn't any mistake.
We heard you—both of us heard
(I think we were wide awake)—
Kissing somebody.

Yes, and the brooding thrush,
In the sunset, heard you too
(And blushed, if a bird can blush,
As away in the wind she flew),
Kissing somebody.

The grey old sea, from the wall,
With his face on fire, withdrew,
(He had listened a minute) and all,
O Echo, because of you—
Kissing somebody.

And the gardener heard you ("So,"
He said, "it is growing late,"
Then lifted his hat to go,
And laughed as he shut the gate)—
Kissing somebody.

And lo, as the sweet sound ran
From your lips, O airy one!
The moon in her veil began
To think of Endymion—
Kissing somebody.

Now, Echo, who could it be?—
I mean the fellow you kissed,
When we two heard you—we—
In the garden, the moon, and the mist,
Kissing somebody.

Narcissus—only—I see.
(Sweet youth come back in a flower !)
Narcissus—if it were he,
No wonder you've been for an hour
Kissing somebody.

WAYSIDE COURTESY.

AN earthen floor, a thatch-roof, low and dark ;
One little window with geraniums red ;
An empty cage, sad for the wingèd lark ;
A stranger guest ; a sudden fire, and bread.

A blue-eyed peasant-girl ; an open door,
And the old sea for ever within call,
To whisper fairily of the Atlantic shore
Unto my servant's sister. That was all.

A FUNERAL ON THE LEE.

[The body of Mr. Jerome J. Collins, of the Jeannette expedition (with that of his mother, who died during his absence in the North), was brought from the United States to Cork, and buried near that city on March 9, 1884, with imposing ceremonies. The funeral procession of boats along the river Lee from Queenstown to Cork, under the flags of England, Ireland, and America, was an impressive sight. The incident of the sealed letter deposited by the Mayor of Cork upon the coffin of Mr. Collins when lowered into the grave—at the written request of an unknown person, who signed himself “A Poor Irish Peasant,” who had been befriended by the dead man—was a touching one.]

Two voiceless voyagers, in their shrouds, together,
Met after years of death,
Land at the old pier in the weird night-weather,
And in the rain-wet breath
Of the March primrose. By the torches, lo!
To the cathedral's stony gloom they go.

Then yearned you not, O mouth by famine
smitten,
O mouth by frost shut fast,
To say somewhat that never shall be written?
O love, the first and last

That men shall know, then yearned you not to
break

Your bands, and kiss your frozen boy awake ?

Soldier and sailor, priest and child and mother,
Close to the coffin pass ;
The barefoot tenant crowds his landlord brother.

I hear the Requiem Mass ;
Shall the dead hear it? Though the thrush
should sing
Outside—the dead would know not anything.

O eyes come home again so still and hollow,
There be fair sights to see
Under the green flag which you blindly follow
This day along the Lee,
What time the harp thereon, for all I know,
Wails wind-wrung trouble, ghostly-far and low.

Three nations walk behind in funeral fashion
(O world of moth and rust !)
Lo, Ireland to her bosom in compassion
Takes back her gift of dust,
And England, by her sister-island, wears
The show of sorrow—which mayhap she shares.

And there, too, from far over seas, O sweetest,
O best beloved of all,
O Land of Promise—not yet broken!—thou
meetest

The bearers of the pall.

Under thy saddened stars I see thee wait
Alone—where some must love and some must
hate.

Ashes to ashes! No, not yet. A debtor
Long at the Mayor's door
Waits in the storm and holds a black-sealed letter
For folded hands. What more?
“From a poor peasant, one to whom the dead
Was a fast friend,” the superscription read.

What gracious record of past pity sleepeth
Hid therein no man knows.
Will that gray graveyard, when the Spring-sun
keepeth
Its bright tryst with the rose,
Bud with strange flowers and sing with other
birds
Than men have heard, born of those buried
Words?

A WORD WITH A SKYLARK.

IF this be all, for which I've listened long,
Oh, spirit of the dew !
You did not sing to Shelley such a song
As Shelley sung to you.

Yet, with this ruined Old World for a nest,
Worm-eaten through and through,—
This waste of grave-dust stamped with crown and
crest,—
What better could you do ?

Ah me ! but when the world and I were young,
There was an apple-tree,
There was a voice came in the dawn and sung
The buds awake—ah me !

Oh, Lark of Europe, downward fluttering near,
Like some spent leaf at best,
You 'd never sing again if you could hear
My Blue-Bird of the West !

HIS ARGUMENT.

“ BUT if a fellow in the castle there
Keeps doing nothing for a thousand years,
And then has—everything! (That isn't fair,
But it's—what has to be. The milk-boy hears
The talk they have about it everywhere).

“ THEN if the man there in the hut, you know,
With water you could swim in on the floor,
(And it's the ground,—the place is pretty, though,
With gold flowers on the roof and half a door!)
Works,—and can get no work and nothing more:

“ WHAT I will do is—nothing! Don't you see?
Then I'll have everything, my whole life
through.

But if I work, why I might always be

Living in huts with gold flowers on them, too—
And half a door. And that won't do for me.”

A DANCE OF THE DAISIES.

So, my pretty flower-folk, you
Are in a mighty flutter ;
All your nurse, the wind, can do
Is to scold and mutter.

“ We intend to have a ball
(That’s why we are fretting),
And our neighbour-flowers have all
Fallen to regretting.

“ Many a butterfly we send
Far across the clover.
(There’ll be wings enough to mend
When the trouble’s over.)

“ Many a butterfly comes home
Torn with thorns and blighted,
Just to say they cannot come,—
They whom we’ve invited.

“ Yes, the roses and the rest
Of the high-born beauties
Are ‘ engaged,’ of course, and pressed
With their stately duties.

“ They’re at garden-parties seen ;
They’re at court presented :
They look prettier than the Queen !
(Strange that’s not resented.)

“ Peasant-flowers they call us—we
Whose high lineage you know :
We, the ox-eyed children (see !)
Of Olympian Juno.”

(Here the daisies all *made eyes* !
And they looked most splendid,
As they thought about the skies,
Whence they were descended.)

“ In our saintly island (hush !)
Never crawls a viper,—
Ho, there, Brown-coat ! that’s the thrush :
He will be the piper.

“ In this Irish island, oh,
We will stand together.
Let the loyal roses go ;—
We don't care a feather.

“ Strike up, thrush, and play as though
All the stars were dancing.
So they are ! And—here we go—
Isn't this entrancing ? ”

Swaying, mist-white, to and fro,
Airily they chatter,
For a daisy-dance, you know,
Is a pleasant matter.

CARRIGALINE CASTLE.

(THE CARMAN'S COMMENTS AT HIS OWN GATE ON SUNDAY EVENING.)

“ You must be frightened by the noise
There at the chapel. Faith, it's only
A merrymaking. Sure, the boys
Have been paid off. The place is lonely,
Except on Sunday, when the weather
Is fine—then they've a row together !

“ You see that rye there ? It's the same
That makes the boys back there so pleasant ;
Your pardon, ma'am. It is a shame
To speak of it when you are present.
But, sure, his honour should be knowing
That rye there is—our whisky, growing.

“ And when they've finished up the hay
The boys, be sure, must all be drinking ;
It's what the Irish will, I say.
No doubt his honour has been thinking

All this is wrong. A drop too many ——
But then our rye's as good as any !

[*Lifting his hat to the priest who drives by
homeward.*]

“The priest, God bless him !” With a smile,
A face as red as any rose's
He raised, and pointed slow, the while,
To where a shattered wall encloses
A shattered stronghold, vague with distance,
Where Time has met a stout resistance.

“You see there,” said he, growing grave,
“There, do you, where that crow is flying ?
One of our kings lived there—as brave
As any. It would be worth trying
To find the likes of him. His name was
McCarthy !” (Ay, and here his fame was !)

“These Desmonds were a glorious race.”
(Of rebels ?) Here he looked defiant
(Toward England ?) Then, with kindly grace,
Said to the child, “He was a giant.”
(Ah ! Master Gold-Head, you'll enchant it—
But darker things than fairies haunt it.)

“Think, will you, of an arm that reaches
Down so that, when one’s standing straight,
The hand can button the knee breeches ;—
That’s what they tell of him. But wait,—
The buttons on them were of gold, ma’am ;
At least, that’s what I have been told, ma’am !”

Grim on the hill the ruin lay,—
By the still sea it dreamed and crumbled.
“Oliver Cromwell came this way,
(In Charles’s time, it was) and tumbled
The castle down !” he added, after
A little very cordial laughter.

“Oliver Cromwell knew how, well,
To tumble old things down.” “He did, ma’am,
He did,” he said, as if to tell
This strong truth pleased him. “But I’m bid,
ma’am,
In to my tea.—And that’s it lying
Away there where the crow is flying !”

THE BISHOP'S THRUSH.

HE folds within his hollow hand
A dream that all outshines
His mitre. It is morning, and
A voice is in his vines.

He listens in his lonesome sleep.
(He is too old for tears?)
Oh, song, oh, song! that maketh him weep
Away his priestly years!

Ah, he would fold his honours up,
He would lay down, in sooth,
Thy cross, oh, Christ! to drink the cup,
The broken cup of youth.

The boy who knows not pity's laws,
Looks up and whispers, "Hush!
I will not throw the stone, because
It is the Bishop's Thrush."

His mother turns away her head,
And to herself a word
Or two she mutters, as in dread :
“ The bird—is not a bird ! ”

. . . Ah, when the Requiem Mass is heard,
For yon gray prelate's sake,
Out of the bosom of the bird
One human cry will break.

The peasant-folk will see it flit
Across his coffin then ;
The Bishop's Thrush (ah, doubt not it !)
Will never sing again.

A NIGHT-SCENE AT CASHEL.

AND this was, then, their Cashel of the Kings,
As babbling legends fondly call it. Oh,
The Cashel now of—certain other things !
Come look by this blurred moon, if you would
know.

From darkness, such as hides the happier dead,
On the damp earth-floor grows a ghastly
flame.

A woman's wasted arm, a child's gold head,
Shrink back into the wind-stirred straw for
shame.

Through the half-door, down from the awful
Rock,
The death-chill from some open grave creeps in.
The skeleton's fixed laugh is seen to mock
The cry for bread below. Oh, shame and sin !

Warm only with the fire of its starved eyes,
In one grim corner crouches a black cat.
. . . Night moans itself away. The sun must
rise,
As it has risen, spite of this or that.

And see ! In meadows beautiful, knee-deep
In bloom, for many a shining mile around,
The undying grass is white with lambs and sheep,
And wandering cattle make a pleasant sound.

HIS VIEWS OF THE CUCKOO.

THE little exile, whose sweet head
Wore yet the Atlantic sun,
Threw down his hoop : "That's it," he said,—
"And it is only one !

"It can't behave like other birds
At home across the sea ;
It tries to make " (I write his words)
"You think it's more than three.

"That cuckoo's not a cuckoo, though,"
I heard him murmuring ;
"It isn't—anywhere, you know ;
It isn't—anything !

"But, somehow, it is—everywhere
At once ! And I suppose
It *can't* build nests, for it's—the air !
I know a boy that knows !"

IN THE ROUND TOWER AT CLOYNE.

[C. L. P., OB. JULY 18, 1884.]

THEY shivered lest the child should fall ;
He did not heed a whit.
They knew it were as well to call
To those who builded it.

“ I want to climb it any way,
And find out what is there !
There may be things—you know there may—
Lost, in the dark somewhere.”

He made a ladder of their fears
For his light, eager feet ;
It never, in its thousand years,
Held anything so sweet.

The blue eyes peeped through dust and doubt,
The small hands shook the Past ;
“ He'll find the Round Tower's secret out,”
They, laughing, said at last.

The enchanted ivy, that had grown,
As usual, in a night
Out of a legend, round the stone,
He parted left and right.

And what the little climber heard
And saw there, say who will,
Where Time sits brooding like a bird
In that gray nest and still.

. . . About the Round Tower tears may fall ;
He does not heed a whit.
They know it were as well to call
To those who builded it.

RACHAEL AT THE LODGE.

I KNOW. It is the world-old wail,
And through the window I can see
The waxen candles, that make pale
The rose outside. Ah me, ah me!—
That light like this should ever fall
On lovers by yon grey sea-wall!

There lies Spike Island¹ in the stars.
Ah, many a mother's boy is there,
Loved once like hers, behind the bars :
Who knows but he——she does not care :
Her dead child was a girl, they say,
The peasant folk who walk this way.

A girl ! And, therefore, born to be
At most, my lady's maid, and wait,
Meanwhile, here barefoot by the sea.
Oh, sobbing keeper of the gate,
Is it sweet to serve and to be still,
In the high house there on the hill ?

¹ Since disused as a prison for convicts.

Or were it sweet to sail—and sleep
Full fathom five below the cries
Of the wet gulls, perhaps, or keep
Awake all night, with tearless eyes
Down in the steerage, but to see
How lone a stranger's land may be ?

Can thoughts like these not make it sweet
To miss her brown head from the sun,
Her singing from the birds', her feet
From following——“ Oh, my little one,
My darling, oh my darling ! ” she,
The unreasoning woman, moans to me.

The Wise-men's star, out of the East
Is shining on her baby's bed.
(Comfort her, crucifix and priest !)
Madonna-face and thorn-stabbed head
Watch from her wall. And yonder lie
The Heavens. And——still that cry, that cry !

QUEENSTOWN, 1884.

A REPROACH.

(ADDRESSED TO IRELAND.)

BEAUTIFUL, cruel Mother, you who sit
Singing with voice of linnet, lark, and thrush,
Among the sorrows born of you ! Is it
Nothing to you, your children's crying ? Hush.

Can rose-leaves cure the heart-ache, think you,
Sweet ?
Are starving mouths with dews and perfumes
fed,
That thus, with your wild brood about your feet,
You give them blossoms when they wail for
bread ?

LAST OF HIS LINE.

(A YOUNG DONKEY LOOKING THROUGH THE RUINED
WINDOW OF HIS FAMILY CASTLE.)

So, there the last lord of the Castle stands
Beside his fireless hearth,
In the wild grass of his ancestral lands,—
The saddest thing on earth.

Framed by his mullioned window, with a guard
Of birds to circle him,
He looks into his desolate courtyard,
Where yet the dew is dim.

The immemorial tower-rose, half awake,
Peeps out—he looks so queer ;
And old-world butterflies begin to take
The wings of morning near.

His Norman blood shows in his long, fair ears,
His voice, if he should—— say,
Is it not like the trumpet-cry one hears
From war-fields far away ?

In his grey garments, with the ivy blown
About his serious face,
He muses, in the sunrise bloom alone,
On his romantic race.

(One of them, somewhere in a golden mist
Of Shakespeare's moonlight rare,
By Queen Titania herself was kissed,—
Oh, but she thought him fair !)

His race ? Great captains, poets, priests, and kings
Were of his race, 'tis said.
The Conqueror himself—— But what odd
things
Will drift into one's head !

Look at him there among his fallen towers,
His family tombs. Ah me,
The sweet young heir of Ruin, crowned with
flowers,
How beautiful is he !

. . . Take heart, my little brother ! Who shall
say
What Time, the Good, will bring ?
You may be king of England yet some day ;
And then—God save the King !

PRO PATRIA.

(FROM EXILE.)

To stand on some grey coast, uncertain, lonely,
As some new ghost wrecked on some other
world,

This is to love my country—the One only !

To watch the boats of strange-voiced fishers,
whirled

Toward islands with strange names, and then to
see—

Nothing that ever was before, ah me !

To watch weird women in great cloaks, for ever
Crying strange fruits, who will not let you be ;
Or shadows in black bridal veils, who never
On earth may hope their plighted Lord to see ;
Or feel some sandal-footed, vision-eyed,
Sad-hooded monk into your wonder glide.

More sad, to wake in some void morning, smitten
 With the sharp shadow-work of dark and
 dream,
Sick with a sorrow that was never written—
 No, not with heart's blood—and to hear the
 scream
Of the wan gulls along the hollow foam
Of alien seas—while blue-birds brood at home.

To think, if it be in the dew-dim languor
 Of the new year, of peach and apple-blooms
By the Ohio—and to start in anger,
 Almost, at glimmerings in the faëry glooms
Where the primroses hide and the young thrush
Makes songs about some old-world daisy's blush.

Or, if it be when gorgeous leaves are flying,
 Through all the mighty woods, where I was
 born,
To sit in immemorial ruin sighing
 To braid the gold hair of the Indian corn,
With my slave-playmates singing, here and
 there,
Ere they were sold to their new master, Care !

Yes, if it be the time when things should wither
 In our old places—(oh, my heart, my heart !
 Whence comes the evil wind that blows you
 whither

It listeth ?)—walking in a dream, to start
 At this immortal greenness, mocking me
 Alike from tower and tomb, from grass and tree :

This is to love my country ! Oh, the burning
 Of her quick blood at the poor jest, the sneer,
 The insolent calm question still, concerning
 Her dress, her manners ! “Are you, then, so
 queer

At home — we mean no harm — as we have
 heard ?”

This is to love my country, on my word !

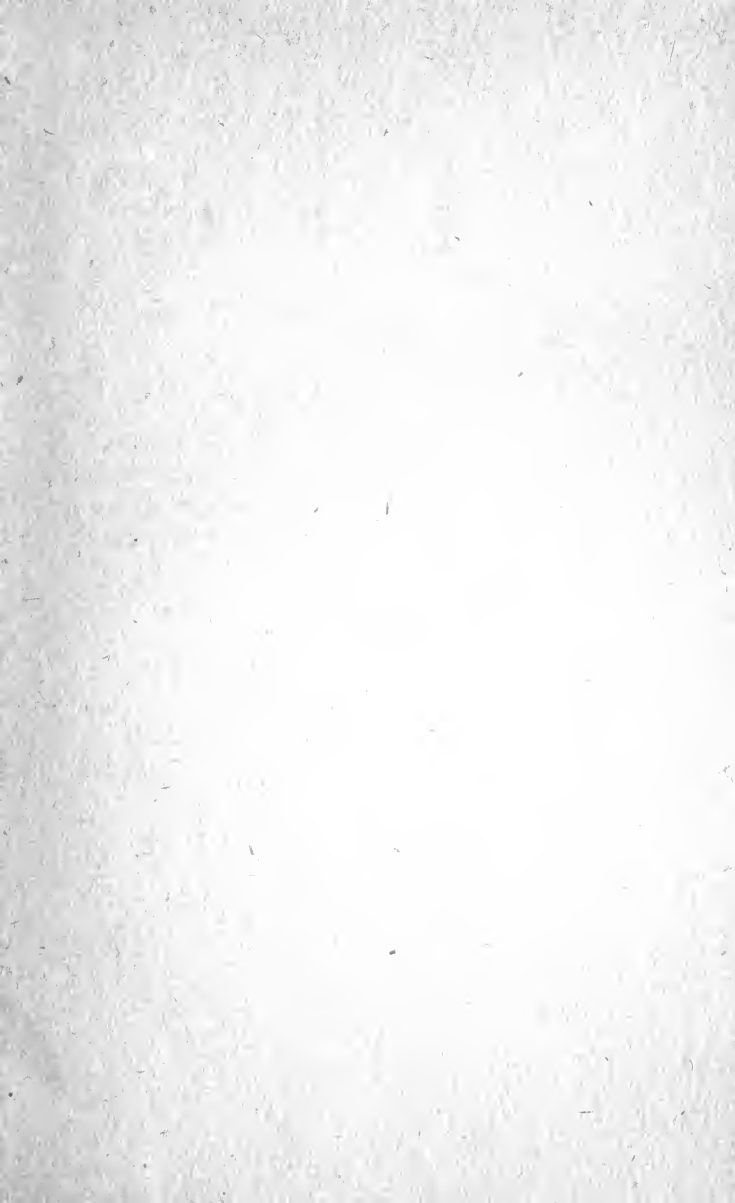
Ah, so across the gulf they hiss and mutter :

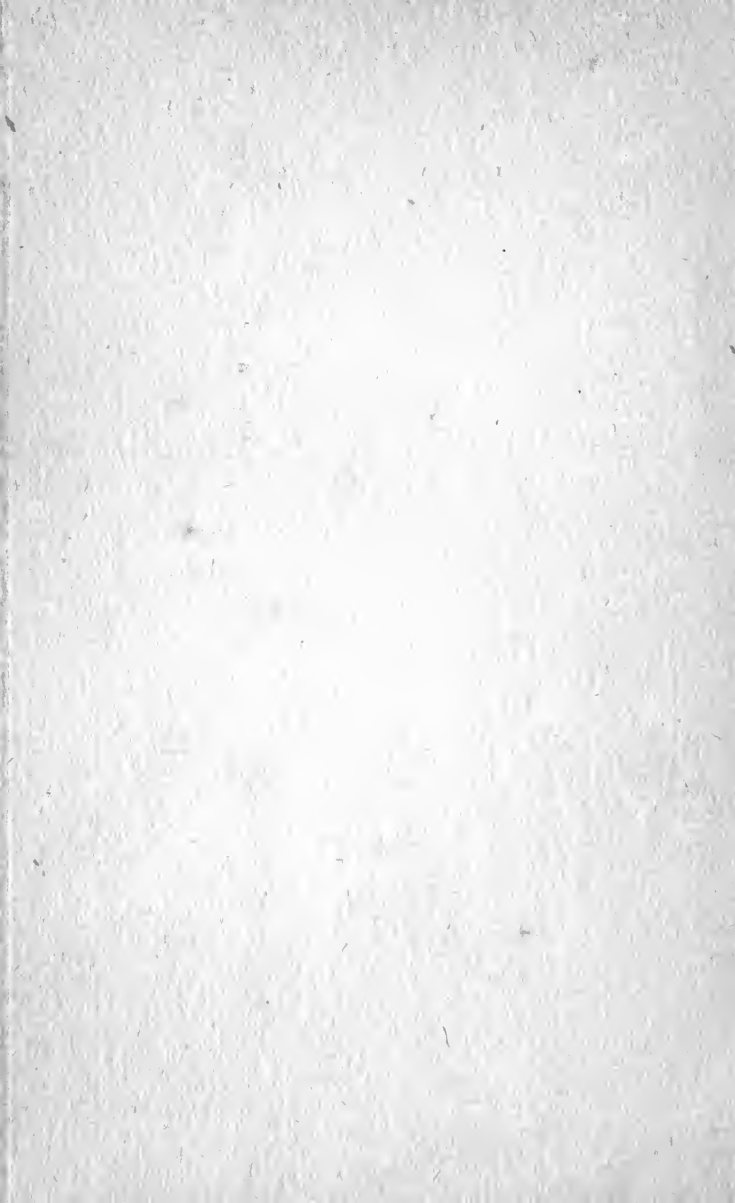
“Her sins they are as scarlet ?” Had they
 been,

Whiter than wool they're washed ! What of the
 utter

Love of her million sons who died for sin
 Not hers but theirs—who, from their common
 grave,

Would rise and die again were she to save !







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